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AUTHOR Lawrence, Sarah; Mears, Daniel P.; Dubin, Glenn; Travis, Jeremy

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on employment-related programs in prison, exploring what the research literature tells about the effectiveness of prison-based education, vocational training, and prison industry on postrelease outcomes. Also studied was the state of practice of such programs and strategic opportunities for improving existing employment-related programs and introducing new programs in prison. Following a review of evaluation research on the effectiveness of education and work-related programs, an inventory of programs in seven states in the Great Lakes region was conducted. Based on the literature review, state profiles, and interviews with correctional administrators and experts, strategic recommendations were developed to improve and enhance prison programming. A conference on correctional programming in September 2001 afforded an additional opportunity to obtain views and research on such programs. Fewer than 15% of inmates receive programming that addresses their educational needs. The work experience and skills of inmates are well below those of the general population, and, overall educational and vocational prison programming has declined for a combination of economic reasons and growth in the number of inmates. The preliminary findings highlight the need for a much more systematic assessment of these issues, but they do suggest that researchers have developed important groundwork in the area of correctional programming. There are core principles that effective programming should reflect. The gap between programming need and resources appears to be considerable, but opportunities for improving and enhancing correctional programming do exist. (Contains 2 figures, 5 tables, and 32 references.) (SLD)

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The Practice and Promise of Prison Programming

Sarah Lawrence
Daniel P. Mears
Glenn Dubin
Jeremy Travis

research for safer communities

RESEARCH REPORT May 2002

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URBAN INSTITUTE
Justice Policy Center
2100 M STREET, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20037
www.urban.org

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I. INTRODUCTION[1]

With increasing numbers of prisoners being released into society, the issue of prison programming has become a critical policy issue. As a result, policymakers and practitioners need information about the effectiveness of prison-based programming, the types and levels of programming currently available, and the opportunities and policy targets for improving and expanding effective prison programming.

With the goal of illuminating these issues, this report focuses specifically on employment-related programs in prison and addresses the following questions:

1. What does the evaluation research literature tell us about the effectiveness of prison-based education, vocational training, and prison industry on post-release outcomes?
2. What is the state of practice of education, vocational training, prison industry, and employment/transitional training in prison?
3. What are the strategic opportunities for improving existing employment-related programs and introducing new programs in prison?

To answer these questions, the Urban Institute first conducted a review of evaluation research on the effectiveness of education and work-related programs. In this report, we refer to these programs collectively as prison or correctional programs.

The Urban Institute conducted an inventory of programs in seven states in the Great Lakes region. These states were selected to illustrate the types and levels of programming in states within a similar region. Our goal was not to provide a national inventory of prison programming, or a systematic analysis of regional differences in programming. Rather, it was to explore and highlight the potential for considerable state-level variation and, as importantly, to identify the extent to which information on prison programming is readily available. In short, we examine these seven states to draw some general lessons that may be relevant to an understanding of prison programming nationally.

This inventory covered employment-related correctional programs and was based on interviews with key stakeholders and extant information sources, such as annual reports from correctional agencies and national surveys of corrections agencies.

Based on the review, state profiles, and interviews with correctional administrators and experts, we present strategic opportunities for improving and enhancing prison programming. A conference held at George Washington University, entitled "Correctional Education and Training: Raising the Stakes" (September 24, 2001), afforded the authors an additional and unique opportunity to obtain up-to-date views and research on correctional programming.

The focus on prison programming is timely because of the dramatic increases in prison populations and the large increases in offenders released into society. Currently—and to anticipate the conclusion of this report—relatively little is known about which specific programs work and for whom, especially in relation to employment outcomes. In addition, relatively little is known about the extent to which or what types of correctional programming are offered.

Our preliminary review highlights the need for a much more systematic assessment of these issues. However, it also suggests that researchers have developed important groundwork in the area of correctional programming. There are core principles that effective programming should reflect. Our review suggests that the gap between programming need and resources is considerable. Few states come close to providing the levels and quality of programming that research indicates are needed to positively impact employment or other outcomes. Finally, practitioners indicate that opportunities, such as engaging private-sector businesses and building strategic partnerships with local and state agencies, currently exist for improving and enhancing correctional programming. However, these opportunities vary depending on the unique context of corrections and correctional programming in specific states.

[1] Grateful acknowledgment is extended to the Joyce Foundation for funding and supporting the creation of this report, and to the practitioners and officials who agreed to be interviewed, including: Lowell Brandt, Iowa Department of Corrections; John Castro, Illinois Department of Corrections; Gary Grueter, Wisconsin Department of Corrections; Carolyn Heier, Indiana Department of Corrections; Rich Johnson, Michigan Department of Corrections; Scott Olson, Minnesota Department of Corrections; Edward Rhine, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections; Mindy Tarlow, Center for Employment Opportunities; Charles Terry, University of Michigan-Flint; and Diane Williams, The Safer Foundation. The authors alone bear responsibility for all statements of fact and interpretation.

II. BACKGROUND

Highlights

- Nationally, and in the seven states examined in this study, prison populations have doubled to quadrupled in size between 1978 and 1998.
- Approximately half of all state and federal inmates have high school diplomas, compared with three-fourths of the general population. Fewer than 15 percent of inmates receive programming that addresses their educational needs.
- The work experiences and skills of inmates are well below those of the general population. This fact, combined with barriers to employment upon release, significantly impair long-term employment prospects for ex-offenders.
- Participation in prison-based vocational programming declined from 31 to 27 percent between 1991 and 1997. Participation in education programming declined even more, from 42 to 35 percent, during this same period.
- Educational and vocational prison programming has declined in part because of the rapid growth in prisons, the frequent transferring of offenders from one facility to another, decreased federal funding for higher education programs, and greater interest in short-term substance abuse treatment and anger management programs.

Prison Growth

Before proceeding to a discussion of the effectiveness, levels, and opportunities for prison programming, we present descriptive information at a national level and for the seven states on the state prison systems we examined. This information, which includes prison populations, prison growth, and incarceration rates, highlights two key issues: the sizable population of offenders in the United States and the dramatic growth in corrections experienced nationally and in each of the selected states.

As table 1 shows, the number of individuals in prison has been increasing over the past two decades. Nationally, the adult prison population more than tripled between 1978 and 1998, growing from 307,276 to 1,299,096 inmates.

All seven states that we investigated have witnessed significant growth in the prison population over the past two decades. Minnesota, whose incarcerated population grew 185 percent between 1978 and 1998, experienced the least growth. Despite the dramatic growth in prison populations, six of the seven states fell below the national average (323 percent). Only Wisconsin's adult prison population, which grew over 440 percent, was higher.

Incarceration rates per 100,000 adults also have risen dramatically during the past two decades. However, as with overall growth in prison populations, six of

Table 1. Overview of Prison Systems, 2000

	Total adult and juvenile prison population[a]	Adult prison population growth (1978-1998)[b]	Incarceration rate per 100,000[a]	Number of facilities[c]
U.S. total	1,381,892	323%	478	
Illinois	45,821	282%	371	• 21 adult • 8 juvenile
Indiana	20,125	290%	335	• 24 adult • 10 juvenile
Iowa	7,955	273%	276	• 9 adult and juvenile
Michigan	47,718	207%	480	• 42 prisons • 13 prison camps
Minnesota	6,238	185%	128	• 8 adult • 2 juvenile
Ohio	45,833	270%	406	• 26 adult • 5 juvenile
Wisconsin	20,612	442%	376	• 33 adult • 5 juvenile

Sources:
a. *Prisoners in 2000*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin.
b. National Prisoner Statistics data series (NPS-1). "Prisoners Under State or Federal Jurisdiction." Bureau of Justice Statistics.
c. Based on interviews and state publications.

the seven states examined in this study had incarceration rates well below the national average of 478 in 2000. Only Ohio's and Michigan's incarceration rates (406 and 480, respectively) approximated this rate.

In short, both nationally and in the seven selected states, the prison populations have grown dramatically during the past two decades. The result has been an expansion in the number of prison facilities to the point where even the smallest of the state prison systems, Minnesota, now operates 10 prison facilities. The largest prison systems, Michigan and Ohio, operate close to 90 facilities combined.

Prison Programming

It is well documented that the education level, work experience, and skills of prisoners are well below the averages for the general population (Andrews and Bonata 1994). The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) established that only 51 percent of all state and federal prisoners had their high school diploma (LoBuglio 2001). The national average for the general population is 76 percent. In this same study, 11 percent of inmates, compared with three percent of general population respondents, self-reported having a learning disability.

The difference between prison and general populations in education levels appears to be driven primarily by a combination of sex, age, and racial characteristics unique to prisons: Namely, most prisoners are "overwhelmingly young, minority males with a higher percentage of high school dropouts and a lower percentage of college experiences than the general population" (LoBuglio 2001, p. 121). Nationally, as LoBuglio (2001) notes, between 7 and 15 percent of inmates receive basic adult education classes, which is far below the extent of need.

The work experience and skills of prisoners also typically are well below that of the general population (Travis, Solomon, and Waul 2001). The lack of work experience and skills, when combined with low education levels and difficulties in obtaining employment upon release, can contribute to a cycle of unemployment that increases the likelihood of further criminal behavior (Austin and Irwin 2001).

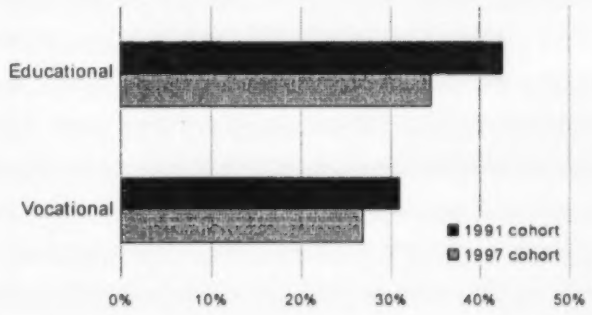
Despite a long-standing historical emphasis in American corrections on education and employment training (Piel 1998; Gaes et al. 1999), and despite the importance of prison programming for improving a range of outcomes upon release, levels of program participation have declined. In 1991, 42 percent of soon-to-be-released prisoners (less than 12 months remaining) reported participating in education programs, compared with 35 percent in 1997 (figure 1). Participation in vocational programs declined from 31 percent to 27 percent during this same period (Lynch and Sabol 2001).

One reason for these declines is the rapid and enormous growth in prisons. Funding for correctional programs has not kept pace with population growth, which has led to a reduction in the number of programs aimed at helping prisoners, such as general literacy and higher education programs, in most state prison systems (Austin and Irwin 2001; Slambrouck 2000). Higher education programming was all but eliminated by federal legislation enacted in 1994 (LoBuglio 2001).

The decrease in correctional programming also is attributable to an indirect effect of the rapid growth in prisons and the shuffling of prisoners from one facility to another. This frequent transferring undermines the ability of prisons to implement effective educational and vocational programs. At the same time, and precisely because of the frequent transferring of prisoners from one facility to another, greater attention and interest have been given to funding substance abuse and anger management programs. One reason is that these programs can be offered on a short-term basis and can be relatively inexpensive compared with educational or vocational training (LoBuglio 2001).

In summary, prison populations have grown significantly while funding for programs and participation rates have declined. These changes are significant because, as the literature review below shows, educational and vocational training can contribute to a range of positive outcomes, including increased employment and reduced recidivism.

Figure 1. Prisoners to Be Released in the Next 12 Months: Percentage Participating in Prison Programs, 1991 and 1997



Source: Lynch and Sabol (2001).

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III. REVIEW OF EVALUATION LITERATURE ON CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS

What does the evaluation research literature tell us about the effectiveness of prison-based education, vocational training, and prison industry on post-release outcomes?

Highlights

- In general, correctional programs can increase post-release employment and reduce recidivism, provided the programs are well designed and implemented.
- A range of methodological limitations preclude any assessment of *direct and unequivocal* beneficial effects of prison programming.
- Promising programs in terms of post-release outcomes include general characteristics, what also might be called principles of effective intervention:
  - focusing on skills applicable to the job market
  - matching offenders' needs with program offerings
  - ensuring that participation is timed to be close to an offender's release date
  - providing programming for at least several months
  - targeting offenders' needs that are changeable and may contribute to crime, such as attitudes and pro-social activities
  - providing programs that cover each individual's needs and are well integrated with other prison programs to avoid potential redundancy or conflict across programs
  - ensuring that prison programming is followed by treatment and services upon release from prison
  - relying on effective program design, implementation, and monitoring
  - involving researchers in programs as evaluators

In this section, we summarize the results of recent reviews and meta-analyses of correctional programming. Meta-analysis is an analytical approach that systematically and rigorously identifies the results of a wide range of studies bearing on a specific topic. Unlike conventional reviews, which can be subject to the unintended or intended biases of authors and the inability to summarize succinctly and empirically the evidence for or against various programs, meta-analyses rely on quantitative techniques that examine specific characteristics of studies and programs (Glass 1976; Cullen and Gendreau 2000). As a result, they generally provide a much better and more scientifically defensible basis for answering the question, "What works?"

Although some meta-analyses of prison programming exist, they do not capture the full range of currently available programming or research. For example, many studies do not report sufficient information about the research or program design to be included in a meta-analysis. Also, for some types of programming (e.g., transitional/pre-release programming), there are too few studies to allow a meta-analysis to be conducted. For this reason, the review below draws on both meta-analyses and reviews to summarize what is known about the effectiveness of prison programming, as defined in this report.

Before proceeding to the literature review, we provide a conceptual framework for understanding the justification for prison programming, historically and from a research perspective, and how prison programming is believed to affect various outcomes. The research literature on the effectiveness of correctional programs often stresses the complexity of the challenge involved in improving outcomes for people held in prison and released back into the community. The conceptual framework is useful for demonstrating this complexity and also for highlighting the underlying logic for prison programming.

Conceptual Framework

Prison programming in the United States historically was predicated on the notion that individualized educational and vocational instruction would help ex-offenders to lead successful lives (Austin and Irwin 2001; LoBuglio 2001). Despite declines in prison programming in recent decades, this justification for prison programming still remains a part of prison operations today. The justification is symbolized in part by reten-

tion of the term "corrections," which, as originally conceived, reflected the idea that offenders could be "corrected" or rehabilitated. In recent decades, researchers have shown that prison programming can indeed contribute to a range of positive outcomes. Unfortunately, and as discussed below, much of this research still remains focused on single outcomes (e.g., recidivism) and suffers from flawed methodological designs.

One difficulty in assessing various programs is that they frequently do not state explicitly the theoretical foundations for anticipating various impacts. For this reason, it can be difficult to determine how exactly a given program is supposed to lead to a particular outcome or what broader goal it is supposed to achieve. However, our analysis of recent reviews suggests a broad-based conceptual framework underlying most prison programming efforts. This framework is outlined in figure 2 to provide a context within which to situate the review of programming provided in the subsequent discussion.

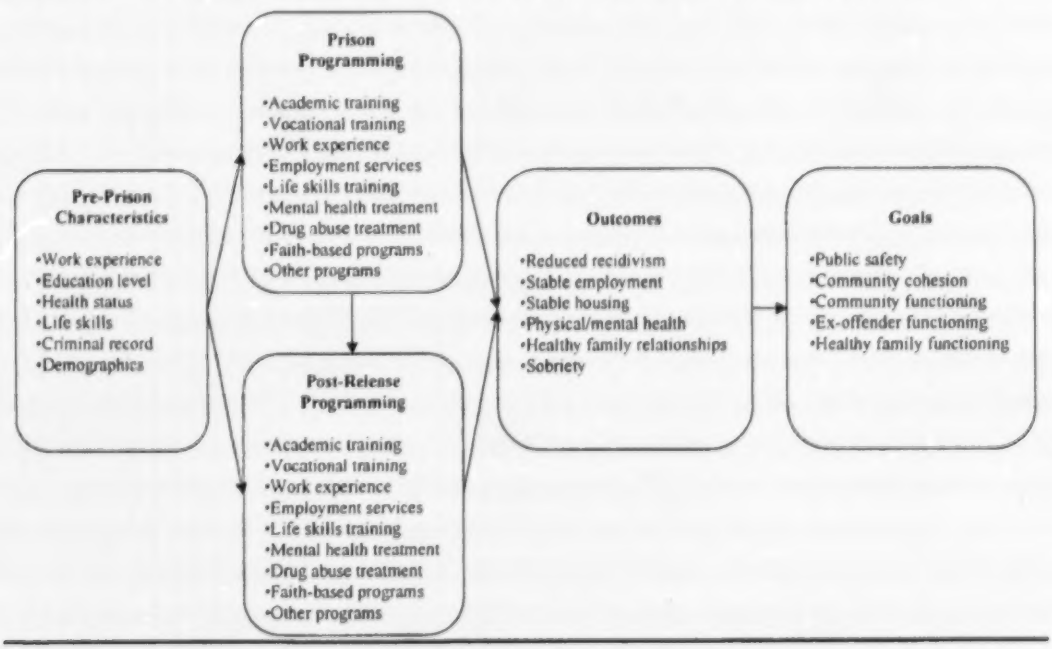
Conceptual Framework: Step-by-Step

The first box in figure 2 depicts the reality that individuals come into prison with a set of individual characteristics that must be taken into account when considering the development of programmatic interventions. Prisoners present individual profiles that reflect their prior work experience, health conditions, life skills, criminal record, and demographic characteristics. This human capital profile presents unique challenges to the design, implementation, and effectiveness of correctional programs.

The second (top) box depicts the range of prison programs offered to help prepare prisoners for life after prison. Four categories of prison programs are discussed later in this report: educational/academic instruction, vocational training, prison industries, and employment/transitional training. Yet these are not the only programs offered to prisoners. Corrections agencies also offer life skills training (e.g., obtaining housing, balancing checkbooks, maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships), mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, faith-based programs, and other types of interventions. Evaluating the effectiveness of one of these interventions is thus complicated by the fact that a prisoner may participate in more than one program, making it difficult to attribute outcomes to a single intervention.

Researchers hypothesize that the overall climate and culture of a prison, including the effectiveness of its programs, may be correlated with successful outcomes after the prisoner's release. In this view, the success of prison managers in inculcating pro-social behaviors among prisoners may be as important as

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Influences on and Outcomes of Individuals Released from Prison



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programmatic offerings (Cullen and Gendreau 2000; Austin and Irwin 2001).

The third (bottom) box describes the array of post-release programs found in correctional practice. These programs typically mirror those offered inside prison: educational/academic instruction, vocational training, work experience and life skills training, mental health and drug treatment, etc. The research literature underscores the importance of linking programs offered in prison with those offered after release. For example, evaluations of in-prison drug treatment interventions have found that these interventions by themselves are only moderately effective in reducing drug use and recidivism. However, when combined with post-release treatment programs in the community, their effectiveness can be significantly enhanced (Gaes et al. 1999).

The fourth box describes the outcomes typically expected by administrators of in-prison and post-release programs. These outcomes are viewed as resulting directly from both sets of programs, but for prison programs, there is an additional expectation of an indirect effect operating through post-release programming. That is, administrators anticipate that offenders who receive services while in prison may be more likely to benefit from post-release programming.

Reduced criminal activity of released offenders is cited in virtually every program design as a key goal. Accordingly, the evaluation literature generally focuses on assessing a program's effectiveness in reducing criminal activity of program participants. Yet other goals frequently are articulated. Employment programs seek to enhance levels of participation in labor markets as well as levels of earnings of program participants after their release from prison. Similarly, health and drug treatment programs aim to enhance mental and physical health, and, more generally, individual and family functioning. Faith-based programs and others have broader goals of improving the quality of life for the prisoner after s/he returns to the community.

These broad and varied goals pose challenges to evaluators and raise important questions about the relative value of different objectives. For example, an employment program may seek to improve job retention rates and may do that, but it may also improve the quality of a prisoner's family life, an outcome that an evaluation may not capture. Similarly, typical evaluations of highly effective drug treatment programs may not conceptualize effectiveness in terms of improving job earnings of prisoners.

The fifth and final box represents some of the most commonly cited long-term goals for individuals released from prison and the families and communities to which they return. According to conventional wisdom among researchers, policymakers, and criminal justice administrators, these prison programs are designed to accomplish broad social goals—to increase public safety, enhance community cohesion, and strengthen the functioning of ex-offenders, families, and communities (e.g., overall socioeconomic conditions). These long-term goals may be realized through achievement of one or more of the outcomes listed in box four. In many instances, they are difficult to measure but nonetheless set the parameters for justifying and, ideally, assessing the merits of particular programs.

In summary, prison programs frequently are justified on the grounds that they contribute to a wide range of *goals*, including improved public safety, greater community cohesion, and improved offender and family functioning. These goals are thought to be realized through various *outcomes*, such as reduced recidivism, stable offender employment and housing, improved family interactions, etc. In each instance, prison programs are designed to address one or more *areas of need* (e.g., education, vocational training, life skills training, mental health and substance abuse treatment) that are believed to contribute to the specific outcomes. And these areas of need in turn are believed to be linked to specific *background characteristics*, such as the age, race, sex, prior record, previous educational and work experiences of offenders, and their mental health and physical status upon entry into prison.

The Purposes of the Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework serves two purposes. First, it highlights the complexity of designing and evaluating interventions involving prisoners, where the measured outcomes occur after release from prison. Second, it places in context the scope of the literature review. Specifically, we reviewed the extant research literature on several categories of prison programming, including educational/academic instruction, vocational training, prison industries, and employment/vocational training. It should be emphasized that in our review, we discovered few studies that examine the combined effects of exposure to multiple programs or the precise benefits associated with provision of follow-up services upon release from prison. Thus, research to date largely misses the major impacts that may (or may not) be associated with prison programming. That said, our review of the evaluation literature suggests that in-prison programming can effect a wide range of outcomes

and, in turn, can contribute to an equally wide range of longer-term goals (Gaes et al. 1999; Cullen and Gendreau 2000; Travis et al. 2001). Here, however, *we restrict our review to the impacts of prison programming on employment outcomes and recidivism.* Although we present examples for illustrative purposes, we have not compiled an inventory of best practices or innovative approaches. For a comprehensive review of all types of adult correctional treatment programs, see Gaes et al. (1999) and Cullen and Gendreau (2000).

Challenges of Program Implementation

A final point should be made before turning to our summary of the evaluation literature. Implementing and operating correctional programs present many challenges unique to correctional settings (Cullen and Gendreau 2000). These challenges can influence not only whether programming is provided but also whether it is effective. For example, staff turnover can reduce the effectiveness of programs. New staff require considerable training and, with insufficient training, may expose program participants to inappropriately implemented therapeutic interventions. Also, prisoners may have pre-existing educational and professional deficits or suffer from substance abuse and mental health disorders. Improving their education level or work experience alone may not be possible or sufficient to generate an appreciable difference in the likelihood of recidivating or maintaining employment.

At a broader level, prison administrators readily acknowledge that their top priority is maintaining control of the prison environment to maximize the safety of guards and prisoners. In an era of prison expansion and constraints on prison budgets, allocating space and resources for correctional programs is not the top priority for correctional managers (Travis et al. 2001). Such factors directly affect programming and are among those most commonly cited by correctional officials as barriers to effective programming (Farabee et al. 1999).

Prison Programming Can Work

In presenting a summary of the research literature on correctional programming, we have drawn extensively on four recent, comprehensive reviews of dozens of individual program evaluations:

- Gaes et al. (1999) reviewed the state of knowledge for all types of adult correctional treatment, including education and work programs, sex offender treatment, and cognitive skills training.
- Cullen and Gendreau (2000) reviewed the state of knowledge for correctional treatment, including a review of recent meta-analyses from both the juvenile and adult treatment literature and a listing of principles of effective programs and interventions.
- Wilson and Gallagher (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of the recidivism outcomes of 33 studies (which included 53 different programs) of education, vocation, and work programs.

Gerber and Fritsch's (1994) review of the literature concluded that "research shows a fair amount of support for the hypothesis that adult academic and vocational programs lead to...reductions in recidivism and increases in employment opportunities" (p. 11). Table 2 presents a summary of their major findings. Across several different types of educational programming, Gerber and Fritsch (1994) found that the majority of studies showed that participants were (a) less likely to recidivate and (b) more likely to be employed after release.

This conclusion is echoed by the other reviews. Gaes et al. (1999) state: "Despite methodological shortcomings and challenges, the evidence suggests that carefully designed and administered education and work programs can...reduce recidivism and promote involvement in pro-social activities after release" (p. 398). They go on to note that "when con-

Table 2. The Effectiveness of Correctional Programming

Pre-college education (elementary/secondary/GED)
- 9 of 14 studies found participants were less likely to recidivate
- 3 of 4 studies found participants more likely to be employed after release

College-level education
- 10 of 14 studies found an inverse relationship between college education and recidivism
- 3 of 3 studies found participants more likely to be employed after release

Vocational programs
- 9 of 13 studies found participants less likely to recidivate
- 5 of 7 studies found participants more likely to be employed after release

Source: Gerber and Fritsch (1994).

sidered as a body of developing scientific work on the impact of prison programs, education and work programs appear able to contribute significantly to increasing offenders' prospects for success" (p. 407).

Wilson and Gallagher's (2000) meta-analysis led to the same conclusion: "This study meta-analyzed the recidivism outcomes of 33 independent... evaluations of education, vocation, and work programs and found that program participants recidivate at a lower rate than nonparticipants" (p. 347). Cullen and Gendreau (2000) reviewed other meta-analyses and, like Gaes et al. (1999), Gerber and Fritsch (1994), and Wilson and Gallagher (2000), concluded that correctional programming, when designed and implemented well, can reduce recidivism and increase employment and health outcomes.

Although the different reviews all arrive at the same conclusion—that is, that correctional programming can reduce recidivism and improve employment outcomes—there are important caveats. First, these reviews, like almost all studies to date, used broad categories to define "education" and "vocational" (or "work") programs. As a result, it is not possible to identify with any confidence specific programs that are effective. In addition, the articles identify numerous qualifications to the general statement that correctional programming can work. Yet despite the many caveats and the lack of information about specific programs that are known to be effective, there are general characteristics of programming—what Cullen and Gendreau (2000) call "principles of effective intervention"—that typically underlie effective programs.

Below, we review the most critical methodological problems in assessing the finding that correctional programming works. This discussion highlights the limits of research to date and the possibilities for future research. We also review a range of general factors (principles of effective intervention) that researchers have identified as characteristics of effective programs.

Methodological Problems Make It Difficult to Identify Specific Programs that "Work"

Although much research indicates that prison programming can work, there are many caveats and exceptions that preclude a listing of specific "best practice" programs. The most critical of these caveats and exceptions are discussed below.

First, the most important issue is that methodological flaws in most studies limit the extent to which researchers can attribute improved ex-offender outcomes to program activities. As Wilson and Gallagher (2000) stated in their meta-analysis of 33 studies, "The generally weak methodological character of these studies prevents attributing observed effects on criminal behavior to the activities of programs" (p. 347). The authors noted that close to 90 percent of the studies included in their meta-analysis suffered from major methodological problems.

Second, almost all evaluations of prison-based programs suffer from selection bias; that is, a positive effect of programming may be due to differential characteristics of the program participants rather than programs (Gaes et al. 1999). In Wilson and Gallagher's (2000) meta-analysis, the authors found that program participants were more likely to be employed after release than nonparticipants. They also found that programs that had an effect on employment also had an effect on recidivism. But they noted that both of these outcomes (lower recidivism and higher employment rates) could possibly be accounted for by selection bias.

A common example of selection bias is when a program is comprised primarily of the most well-behaved and well-motivated inmates who volunteer to participate. When compared with a group of offenders not exposed to a particular program, the program participants may well have better outcomes, but these outcomes most likely are due to the participants themselves instead of the program. Despite the wealth of research to date, few studies have employed randomized designs that can help remove the influence of selection biases.

The issue of prisoner motivation, voluntary/compulsory program participation, and program effectiveness merits additional comment. Few prison programs are compulsory. At the same time, existing programs generally do not have sufficient slots for all inmates who wish to participate. As a result, those prisoners who participate in prison programs typically are highly motivated. This characteristic of programs tends to confound almost all program evaluations because those who participate are different from general population inmates. (Only a small

Does Prison Programming Work?

The Short Answer: The four articles reviewed by the Urban Institute draw similar conclusions: In general, participants in prison-based educational, vocational, and work-related programs are more successful—that is, they commit fewer crimes and are employed more often and for longer periods of time after release—than are nonparticipants.

handful of studies to date involve random assignment of inmates to various programs—Gaes et al. 1999, Saylor and Gaes 1992.) Consequently, comparisons between the two populations (program participants versus nonparticipants) should not be made, or should be made with caution.

Third, even when studies employ rigorous methodological designs and identify effects that can be linked directly to programming, they frequently cannot identify the particular aspects of programming that contributed to the improved outcome (e.g., the quality of instruction, the staff-to-inmate ratio, the duration of programming). As a result, it becomes difficult to identify the specific aspects of programming that should be given the most attention. For programs involving multiple foci (e.g., vocational skills training coupled with education), this issue is especially problematic.

Fourth, few studies carefully differentiate among types of programs. Thus, while many studies indicate that vocational training can decrease recidivism, the activities comprising vocational training can be quite diverse, including job interviewing techniques, basic job skills (e.g., punctuality, cleanliness, effective resumes), and training in specific trades (e.g., carpentry, metalwork). The diversity of programming makes it difficult to know which specific activities, or combinations of activities, led to a particular outcome.

Fifth, few studies or programs targeting employment outcomes systematically address the long-term motivation of offenders to be employed. The result is that many programs may fail to realize their full potential in promoting employment outcomes (Bushway and Reuter 2002). That is, many programs might be successful, or more successful, were they to address more systematically the long-term motivation of offenders. However, few studies assess motivation, and so it is difficult to know precisely how or to what extent motivation affects long-term employment outcomes (Bushway and Reuter 1997).

In short, based on available evidence, it can be asserted that correctional programs most likely reduce recidivism and increase employment outcomes. But until more and better studies are conducted that address the types of methodological issues raised above, it will not be possible to conclude that there is a direct and unequivocal link.

Effective Programs Share Similar Characteristics

The evaluation literature identifies characteristics that appear to be associated with the most promising correctional programs (Cullen and Gendreau 2000; Gaes et al. 1999; LoBuglio 2001; Wilson and Gallagher 2000). Cullen and Gendreau (2000) refer to these characteristics as principles of effective intervention because they are factors that research consistently identifies as underlying the most effective programs. These general characteristics include:

- focusing on skills applicable to the job market,
- matching offenders' needs with program offerings,
- ensuring that participation is timed to be close to an offender's release date,
- providing programming for at least several months,
- targeting offenders' needs that are changeable and may contribute to crime, such as attitudes and pro-social activities,
- providing programs that cover each individual's needs and are well-integrated with other prison programs to avoid potential redundancy or conflict across programs,
- ensuring that prison programming is followed by treatment and services upon release from prison,
- relying on effective program design, implementation, and monitoring, and
- involving researchers in programs as evaluators.

Each of these factors has direct relevance for programming aimed at post-release outcomes. For example, focusing on skills applicable to the job market is critical because employers hire people who can meet their particular needs. Thus, if prisons train inmates in trades or skills that are outdated or unneeded, prisoners' job prospects are reduced. Matching offenders' needs with program offerings means that prisoners are exposed to programs that enhance or add to their existing toolbox of skills, thus increasing the likelihood that they can find work upon release. Participation in programs ideally should be timed to be close to an offender's release date, so that the skills are up-to-date, reflecting current market demands, and so that their skills, as well as work habits, are internalized. Few programs can effectively address an offender's needs in a short period of time. Thus, correctional programming should be consistently provided for an extended period of time, generally for at least three to six months.

The most effective programs typically address the dynamic needs of offenders. Dynamic needs are those that may contribute to crime and that are changeable

(e.g., attitudes). They stand in contrast to static risk factors that are not changeable (e.g., prior record). When changeable needs are linked to criminal offending (e.g., association with criminals rather than pro-social peers), they sometimes are referred to as criminogenic needs (Cullen and Gendreau 2000).

Regardless of the terminology, the important insight flowing from the distinction between dynamic/criminogenic needs and static risk factors is that resources should be placed where they will most likely have an impact that can lead both to reduced offending and to increased positive outcomes, such as employment. However, programming that generically targets all needs are less likely to be effective than those targeting the specific needs of individuals. For example, some offenders may have drug treatment needs while others may have mental health needs. An intervention that targets these specific needs rather than a general set of presumed needs is more likely to be effective.

Programs that combine these different characteristics—that is, that are multi-modal in nature—are, in general, more likely to be effective than those that are not. Thus, if an inmate has vocational needs as well as substance abuse and life skills needs, the efficacy of any one of these interventions is enhanced if each of the offender's needs is addressed. Moreover, program effectiveness is enhanced even more if treatment and services are well integrated, reducing redundancy within the system and ensuring that different programs do not work at cross-purposes with one another.

Continuity of services is especially critical for inmates returning to the community. Without continuity, treatment and training are likely to decline in efficacy or to be undermined by other factors (e.g., drug relapse will likely affect employment stability). Many of the services inmates receive—drug treatment, mental health counseling, educational or vocational training—provide a foundation upon which successful reentry can be facilitated. But taken alone, they are likely to be insufficient, especially given that there are additional issues inmates face during the transition into society, including difficulties finding housing or obtaining medical or health services. For this reason, a range of treatment and services provided during and after reentry into society can assist offenders to maintain or increase their progress and the likelihood of sustained employment and reduced recidivism.

Finally, without careful program design, implementation, and monitoring, it is impossible to know whether or how programs are effective. The best programs typically involve researchers at all stages of development, relying on both process and outcome evaluations to improve program design and operations. This involvement can ensure that ineffective programs either are eliminated or significantly modified. It also can ensure that effective programs maintain or improve their effectiveness by focusing on areas that can be significantly changed with little to no additional costs.

An additional point bears emphasis. Earlier, we noted that a major problem with studies to date is that inmates in prison programs tend to be more motivated than nonparticipants. Participation in programs typically is voluntary, and so generally the most motivated prisoners participate in programs. However, there is a different way to view this dilemma: Perhaps the goal of correctional administrators should be to find ways to foster offenders' motivation to better themselves. In a recent publication, Bushway and Reuter (2002) stress the importance of motivation and, in so doing, raise precisely this policy implication: "The overwhelming evidence from 30 years and billions of dollars of government spending is that it is very difficult to change an individual's employment status and earnings level...We believe the primary reason is that they themselves need to be motivated to work before things like job skills can make a difference."

In conclusion, when situated in the context of the trends in prison populations described in the first section of this report, the following picture emerges:

- Prison populations have grown four-fold over the past 20 years.
- The rate of participation in prison-based educational and vocational programs has declined over the past decade.
- The implementation of effective programs in prison is hampered by the correctional environment, one that is driven by a need to maintain prison control and to contain costs.
- Educational and work-related programs generally have been found to be effective, but

Effective Programming: Specific Programs vs. Adherence to General Principles

Effective programming appears to have less to do with a particular type of intervention. Rather, effective programming seems to have much more to do with ensuring that a core set of general, but nonetheless critical, program characteristics or principles is adopted. When these are present, the likelihood of sustained changes in individuals and in long-term outcomes is increased.

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with important caveats due to the methodological limitations of research to date.

- Programs that adhere to a broad set of "principles of effective intervention"—including targeting specific needs, providing programming for at least three to six months prior to release, relying on multi-modal, comprehensive programming, ensuring the continuity of programming after release from prison—tend to be more effective than those that do not.
- Focusing on improving the motivation of offenders may be the most important and most effective strategy for enhancing their long-term employment prospects.

IV. PRISON PROGRAMMING: INVENTORIES IN SEVEN STATES

What is the state of practice of education, vocational training, prison industry, and employment/transitional training in prison?

Highlights

- Many states do not distinguish from among a range of specific prison programming activities. A common example is the categorization of vocational training, employment/transitional training, and prison industries as "work programs."
- Reducing recidivism and preparing offenders for successful reintegration into society is the primary goal of most types of correctional programs, including education and vocational training, prison industries, and employment services.
- For most of the types of programming in each of the seven states, fewer than 10 percent of inmates participate in the programming, lower than national-level participation rates. Since research suggests that the vast majority of inmates have significant educational, vocational, and employment deficits, it appears that few inmates are receiving the programming that they may need.
- Educational programming is the most common type of prison programming, with upwards of half of all inmates receiving some type of educational classes. The 1994 elimination of federal Pell Grants has resulted in a dramatic decrease in post-secondary education programs among the seven states in this study and nationwide.
- Vocational programs are considerably less prevalent than education programs.
- Prison industries programming is the least prevalent form of programming available to inmates in the seven states examined in this study.
- Employment/transitional services are not provided in some states, while in others, up to 30 percent of inmates receive assistance in obtaining post-release employment.
- To develop accurate profiles on the prevalence, duration, intensity, and quality of programming, research is needed that relies on standardized classification schemes and interviews with inmates, staff, and administrators.

An Overview of Program Types

Although most states offer educational and vocational training, many do not differentiate from among several distinct types of programming that can be included in the latter. In particular, vocational training frequently serves as a broad category encompassing training for specific vocations, prison industries work, and instruction in how to obtain and retain a job, what we term here as "employment services" training. Since these different activities represent distinct types of programming (Bushway 2001), we present information on state-level prison programming using four categories: educational instruction, vocational training, prison industry, and employment services.

These employment-related programs are intended to help offenders become responsible and employable members of their communities upon release. States often give different emphasis to each of these types of programs, but they generally agree on the primary goal: preparing offenders for successful reintegration into society. This preparation may include achieving a certain level of education before release, developing trades and employment skills to be applied after release, or developing "work-ready" skills that will help an offender look for, secure, and maintain employment.

Types of Prison Programming

- *Educational programming* typically includes adult basic education (ABE) classes, high school/general education degree (GED) classes, and post-secondary classes.
- *Vocational training* typically involves skills development in a particular trade or industry, such as carpentry, auto detailing, electronic servicing, graphic arts/printing, horticulture, masonry, and welding.
- *Prison industries programming* typically involves work in a particular industry, including traditionally prison-based industries (e.g., license plate manufacturing, laundry, food services) as well as farming, textiles, and restoration (i.e., computer refurbishing).
- *Employment services training* typically involves providing assistance in how to obtain and retain employment, including job interviewing skills, resume development, and professional workplace habits.

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Table 3 provides a snapshot of the state of programming for incarcerated offenders in the seven states examined in this review. The intent of this inventory is to illustrate some state practices and the variation across states that can exist, not to provide a national portrait of prison programming. All of them provide some form of educational classes, but only two provide special education classes. No core set of vocational training is provided among the states. Instead, each offers a wide range of vocational training. Some states provide employment services, while others provide none. And prison industries also vary, with most states offering traditional work opportunities and some also offering non-traditional types of programming, such as market research.

Educational Programs

We divide correctional educational programs into three categories: adult basic education (ABE), which includes instruction in basic-level math and reading comprehension; high school/general education degree (GED) programs; and post-secondary classes. Most states also offer Title 1 education classes for offenders under 21 who have an educational disability. Title 1 Grants to local education agencies provide financial assistance for instructional programs and counseling for students who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the state's performance standards. ABE and Title 1 programs are the most well-established types of academic programs due to federal and state funding that has been fairly consistent and large relative to other types of correctional program funding.

As shown in table 3, all seven states offer high school and GED certificate classes in correctional facilities. Offenders who are near completion of their high school diploma can enroll in high school credit programs. Other offenders can prepare to take the GED exam with a comprehensive preparation course that often includes practice exams. All juvenile offenders must attend high school classes during the day. The cost of these programs is paid by each state, with the federal government providing subsidies for juvenile education programs. Funding for adult education programs often is supplemented with required contributions by inmates. In some cases, programs may be subsidized by wages inmates earn in prison employment. In others—notably post secondary education classes—inmates are required to pay for their own classes from personal savings or through scholarships provided by private foundations.

The Need for Better Data and Research on Prison Programming

To obtain an accurate picture of prison programming, better data and research are needed. Current data sources do not readily allow researchers or administrators to provide basic descriptive information about prison programming, including the prevalence, duration, intensity, or quality of programming. Although a general sense of programming strengths and weaknesses can be gleaned from annual reports, considerably more in-depth, comprehensive, and detailed information is necessary for accurately assessing the state of prison programming, not only in the states examined in this study but nationwide. Studies that rely on standardized classification schemes and interviews with staff, administrators, and inmates would yield more useful and accurate information about current weaknesses and strategic opportunities and partners to improve prison-based programming.

Table 3. Types of Correctional Programs Offered

	Education	Vocation	Prison Industry	Employment Services
Illinois	• Pre-GED • GED/HS • Post-secondary	• 50 different programs	• Traditional	• Pre- and post-release program
Indiana	• ABE • GED/HS • Post-secondary • Title 1	• 21 different programs	• Traditional • Food • Farms	• No statewide programs
Iowa	• Literacy • GED/HS • Post-secondary	• No statewide programs	• Traditional • Farm • Private Sector • Restoration	• No statewide programs
Michigan	• ABE • GED/HS • Post-secondary	• 16 different programs	• Traditional • Restoration	• Pre- and post-release program
Minnesota	• ABE • GED/HS • Special ed.	• Post-secondary Voc. ed.	• Traditional • Market research	• Pre-release courses
Ohio	• ABE • GED/HS • Applied academic	• 27 different programs	• Traditional • Restoration	• Apprenticeship program
Wisconsin	• ABE • GED/HS • Special ed./Title 1	• Certified • Non-certified	• Traditional • Farm • Restoration	• Pre- and post-release program

Sources: Based on interviews and a review of state materials.
ABE = adult basic education
GED = general education degree
HS = high school

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Post-secondary classes include associate degree classes and, in some states, bachelor degree classes. Because Pell Grants are no longer available to offenders, inmates are responsible for paying their own tuition for post-secondary classes. Pell Grants are federal financial awards given to college students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs. These grants were available to inmates until 1994, when Congress eliminated the use of Pell Grants for inmates. This ineligibility has resulted in small numbers of programs for and enrollments in post-secondary classes. Diane Williams, president and CEO of the Safer Foundation in Chicago, believes that denying access to Pell Grants has reduced the number of higher education options and curriculum choices available to inmates (September 28, 2001, Urban Institute interview), a view echoed by LoBuglio (2001). The Safer Foundation, based in Chicago, is one of the country's largest community-based providers of employment services for ex-offenders. Ms. Williams suggests that without access to higher education, offenders face difficult odds in finding employment upon release.

Among the four types of prison programming examined in this study, education represents the primary type of prison programming offered to prison inmates. All the individuals surveyed for this project identified education as an essential rehabilitation element for offenders to be released. One reason is that most inmates have education levels well below those of the general population.

Because inmates' educational needs are so widespread, few prison systems are able to offer an adequate number of programs. For example, offenders in Iowa prisons filled all literacy programs to capacity in 2000 (Iowa Department of Corrections 2000), and the Michigan Department of Corrections (DOC) has a waiting list of 900 offenders who need basic literacy education (Michigan Department of Corrections 2000). Similarly, Ohio estimates that 50 to 80 percent of all its offenders are learning disabled (Cogswell 1994). Providing educational services to address these offenders' particular needs has proven to be a challenge.

The quality of educational programming also has suffered as a result of increased demand and decreased funding. For example, among those offenders who receive educational programming, the quality of programming frequently is constrained by low staff-to-inmate ratios. A 1994 study by the Ohio Legislative Office of Education Oversight regarding educational programming in the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC) found that overcrowding was among the top factors limiting the effectiveness of prison education programs (Cogswell 1994). This same report recommended that the ODRC continue to provide a full range of education opportunities to meet inmate needs.

Other states identified similar challenges. Indiana, for example, reported that only 65 percent of juvenile males in adult facilities were eligible for special education subsidies from the federal government (Indiana Department of Corrections 2000). In Wisconsin, 49 percent of inmates lack either a high school diploma or its equivalent, and 75 percent of adult offenders perform math at the eighth grade level or lower (Wisconsin Department of Corrections 2000). Because of overcrowding, teachers and administrators reportedly lack the ability to adequately address the educational needs of prisoners. And in states such as Ohio, most of the offenders with special education needs are taught by prison educators who are not certified in special education (Cogswell 1994).

Access to Post-Secondary Classes in Iowa Prisons

Iowa offenders who can obtain the necessary funding are allowed to take community college courses without leaving their correctional facility. Each correctional facility is connected to a statewide fiber optics network allowing inmates to participate in community college classes from a prison classroom. The loss of the federal Pell Grants effectively eliminated this program because inmates became responsible for paying for their own college classes. Today, there are few prisoners who can afford to pay to participate in community college classes via two-way audio and one-way video technology. This example illustrates ways in which changes in federal funding (e.g., Pell Grants) have impacted state correctional programming, as well as ways in which states have attempted to adapt to such changes.

Source: Lowell Brandt, Offender Services, Iowa Department of Corrections, telephone interview, August 24, 2001, the Urban Institute.

Vocational Programs

As table 3 shows, the second most prolific type of programming in correctional facilities is vocational training. Broadly defined, vocational programs involve the training of offenders in certain skill sets to be used in future jobs upon release. Vocational training is important because offenders often lack the skills needed to successfully compete in the labor market (LoBuglio 2001; Travis et al. 2001).

Most states offer vocational training programs that emphasize the importance of leaving the prison system with a skill or trade. These states offer vocational programs certified by a technical college system or an independent, industry-accepted agency, and

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prisoners who successfully complete these programs receive a certificate that is intended to enhance their ability to get a job upon release.

Each of the states in the present study approach vocational programming differently. In some states, to be eligible to enroll in a vocational program, offenders must first complete a certain level of education, usually a high school diploma or its equivalent. In Minnesota, offenders must first have received a GED or high school diploma to participate in advanced vocational programs. This requirement is intended to ensure that offenders possess the needed skills to complete the program. Some states give priority to academic training and make certain levels of academic achievement necessary for participating in vocational training. The Illinois Department of Corrections and the Minnesota Department of Corrections both illustrate this strategy. Each state has grouped vocational and educational classes together, requiring that academic standards be met before vocational classes can be taken.

To enhance the value of vocational training, many prison-based vocational programs offer certificates to graduates. The significance of the certificates varies depending on the vocation and the inclusion of community organizations. In some cases, outside accrediting agencies teach offenders trades, ensuring that they meet established industry standards prior to receiving a certificate. For example, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections offers 23 programs certified by the Wisconsin Technical College System. These programs include auto body, auto detailing, electronic servicing, graphic arts/printing, horticulture, masonry, offset press technician, refrigeration servicing, and welding. In other cases, certification is simply an internal procedure, conducted in consultation with outside organizations. For example, in Ohio, a statewide vocational advisory board and a crafts council provide ongoing assistance to ensure the appropriateness and quality of vocational program selections.

A different approach is evident in Indiana. In this state, the Department of Corrections has a division (Adult and Vocational Programs) whose responsibility is to provide a wide range of vocational opportunities. Currently, the state offers 21 separate vocational opportunities. Although the vocational subdivision is housed within the DOC's Education Services Division, both operate under a unique mission. Each facility has a vocational committee that creates the facility's curricula and teaching requirements for vocational teachers. Vocational committees work with local area vocational schools to ensure vocational teachers are using the most up-to-date techniques and equipment (Indiana Department of Corrections 2000).

In many states, the types of vocational programs offered depend on student interest, instructor availability, and funding availability. Five states—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin—have extensive vocational curricula. Illinois alone provides over 50 different vocational programs. Recent funding problems have resulted in Iowa reducing its vocational programming significantly. According to Lowell Brandt, assistant director of Offender Services at the Iowa DOC, the decline in vocational programming was closely tied to the loss of federal Pell Grants (August 24, 2001, Urban Institute interview). Through Pell funding, community college professors provided academic instruction, but this instruction frequently included a focus on specific vocational trades. When funding for these classes declined, so, too, did participation in classes aimed at vocational training.

The vocational programs offered in many correctional facilities today are viewed skeptically by some observers. For example, according to Diane Williams, corrections personnel frequently attempt to link vocational programs to general rather than specific market demands (September 28, 2001, Urban Institute interview). Ms. Williams, who works with released offenders in Illinois and Indiana to find jobs, is not convinced, however, that this approach benefits her clients. She would rather see training that was industry specific so that program graduates of, for example, an inventory management software system could demonstrate a solid understanding of the inventory management process. Offenders would then have a greater likelihood of adding value above a candidate with entry-level skills and, therefore, be more likely to be hired and to command a higher salary.

Completion of Vocational Programs in Indiana Leads to Reduced Time in Prison

In Indiana, state legislation allows inmates to reduce their sentences by completing vocational programming. The result appears to be an increase in the number of inmates taking advantage of existing vocational opportunities. Currently, the Indiana Department of Corrections offers 21 vocational tracks. The Department emphasizes occupations the Indiana Department of Workforce Development has classified as both low supply and high demand. Offenders receive highly technical training from professional instructors.

Source: Carolyn Heier, Division of Programs and Community Service, Indiana Department of Corrections, telephone interview, August 15, 2001, the Urban Institute.

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In response to these types of concerns, Indiana's Department of Corrections now designs its vocational programs to provide offenders with training in occupations the Indiana Department of Workforce Development classifies as having a low supply of personnel and a high demand (Indiana Department of Corrections 2000). Few other states appear to link their vocational training systematically to specific market demands.

Prison Industries

Prison industry programs have always been a part of state correctional systems (Austin and Irwin 2001). In contrast to vocational training, which focuses on helping inmates develop skills that may help them obtain employment upon release, prison industries focus primarily on keeping inmates occupied and on providing a means by which prison systems can be self-sufficient. Although they have always served state needs—by reducing prisoner idleness and lowering operating costs—prison industries have also become an important tool to provide offenders with useful job skills and training. Prison officials view these programs as adding value to the community by providing services and, through these services, a form of restorative justice, that is, reparation for harms to society (National Correctional Industries Association 1998).

As table 3 shows, a wide range of work activities make up the area of "prison industries," including traditional work, such as license plate manufacturing, laundry, and food services. Some states offer innovative prison industry programs, including farming, textiles, and computer refurbishing, where offenders renovate and update old, used computers for use in elementary, middle school, and high school classes.

Although many states have prison industries, the number of offenders enrolled in these programs is relatively small. The average number of prisoners in prison industries ranges from 3 to 15 percent. MINNCOR Industries in Minnesota boasts one of the highest participation rates (16 percent) in the country (MINNCOR Industries 2000). Due in part to limited demand (the majority of programs we examined produce goods and services only for government and nonprofit organizations) and the prohibitive cost of equipment and supplies, prison industries comprise a relatively small part of the overall set of programming activities in the states examined in this study.

In states where the focus of prison industries includes an attempt to train offenders for specific types of jobs, a need has emerged to develop highly diversified programming. For example, Indiana's 14 facilities offer opportunities in over 50 different industries for offenders, ranging from producing furniture to farming (PEN 2000).

In addition to emphasizing offender skill-building, all seven states produce goods for state agencies. Michigan State Industries, for example, produces goods and services for governmental entities and nonprofit organizations in Michigan and other states (Michigan Department of Corrections 2001). However, some prison industries also have used private-sector partnerships to increase the opportunities for inmates and to create important ties with community organizations. For example, four state programs—Iowa Prison Industries, PEN Products (Indiana), MINNCOR Industries (Minnesota), and Wisconsin Bureau of Correctional Enterprises—have taken advantage of the federal Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIE) (see sidebar) to produce goods through the private sector. The PIE program is reported by the National Correctional Industries Association (2001) to provide a cost-effective means of providing offenders with marketable job skills.

In most states, prison industries strive to be self-sufficient operations, not dependent on state funding. Some states have been successful in achieving self-sufficiency and have done so in part by eliminating certain industries that were not efficient to operate or did not yield a profit. For example, Illinois eliminated problematic, inefficient programs during a restructuring process in 1999 and 2000. As a result, Illinois Correctional Industries realized an overall profit of $3.8 million in 2000 (Illinois Correctional Industries 2000). Similarly, MINNCOR has a five-year plan to achieve financial self-sufficiency. It is refining its product line to better serve the needs of its customers (MINNCOR Industries 2000).

One result of the restructuring of prison industries, according to interview respondents, has been a decrease in the prison industry opportunities for offenders. But these decreases frequently are temporary, followed by increased opportunities. In Illinois, for example, the prison industries that were retained have been sufficiently profitable such that the Illinois Correctional Industries has begun investigating strategies for expanding training opportunities for inmates and for improving the quality of training (Illinois Correctional Industries 2000). Similarly, Indiana's Prison Industries, PEN Products, adopted a business model 10 years ago with the intention of building a strong customer base, leading to job growth. In 2000, PEN Products was able to expand its production and de-

velop new products, each of which required the participation of more inmates than in the past in prison industries.

Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program

Administered by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIE) encourages states and local governments to establish employment for prisoners through private-sector work opportunities. The PIE program exempts state departments of corrections (and private-sector partners) from certain restrictions on the sale of prisoner-made goods in interstate commerce. For example, it lifts the $10,000 sales limit on goods and services sold to the federal government by state departments of corrections. Congress created the PIE program in 1979 as a cost-effective way of reducing prison idleness, increasing inmate job skills, and improving the success of offender transition into the community upon release. Thirty-nine state and local jurisdictions are currently certified under the PIE program, including Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Ohio is among those 39 certified jurisdictions but currently does not have an active program. Wages made by inmates in private-sector work opportunities since 1979 have exceeded $190 million. The vast majority of those funds, which are paid by the private employers to the prison industries, are spent on room and board of state prisoners, support for dependants of prisoners, support for victims, and taxes.

Source: National Correctional Industries Association (2001).

Experts with whom we spoke register the same concerns with prison industries as they do with vocational programs—namely, that there is too much emphasis placed on reducing offender idleness and not enough emphasis on developing the skills offenders need to obtain post-release employment. They note that what offenders learn in many prison industries provides a limited foundation for obtaining higher paying jobs when inmates are released. Yet, as Phyllis Eisen, of the National Association of Manufacturers, noted at a recent conference ("Correctional Education and Training: Raising the Stakes," September 24, 2001), manufacturers anticipate needing over 10 million workers during the next decade, suggesting that even workers with minimal skills who have at least some exposure to a range of manufacturing industries may have better job prospects than offenders without this exposure. In addition, through the PIE program and other such initiatives, offenders are gaining valuable interaction with private businesses, providing opportunities to show prospective outside employers their skills and abilities.

Employment Services Programs

Programs that help offenders develop the skills to gain and maintain employment can be as important as those programs that teach the requisite skills to perform the job (Bushway 2001). In a growing effort to prepare inmates for employment upon their release, state departments of corrections have developed specialized curricula to deal with the unique challenges offenders face. These programs are designed to work with offenders in the later stages of their incarceration through their release and parole period.

Five of the states surveyed for this study offer a diverse selection of employment services, while two offer none (see table 3). The vast majority fall into two general categories: classes directly related to employment and classes indirectly related to employment. Those directly related to employment include job placement services, interview skills, and job readiness (arriving on time, dressing appropriately, etc.). Classes that are indirectly related to employment upon release include basic life skills, stress management, and conflict resolution.

One example of an employment services program for both pre- and post-release is Texas's Project RIO (Re-Integration of Offenders). This program operates 62 offices with more than 100 employees and provides services for 16,000 parolees each year throughout the state (Finn 1998). The program provides job preparation services to prisoners while they are still incarcerated and provides full services to help parolees find and retain jobs once released from prison.

Of the seven states we examined, Ohio and Illinois have the largest number of offenders participating in employment services programming. In Ohio, over 15,000 offenders (33 percent of all offenders) were enrolled in the state's pre-release program in 1999. The pre-release program provides job search training skills and helps offenders set career and life goals (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections 2000). The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections also classifies its apprenticeship programs as employment services. Many of the apprenticeship programs teach the same skills an offender might learn in a vocational class or in a prison industry. However, the emphasis is on teaching inmates how to work closely with a trained professional and developing interpersonal skills needed on the job.

The Illinois Department of Corrections created the PreStart Program in 1991 to focus on improving the parole system. The program, which works with over 11,000 Illinois prisoners (24 percent of all inmates), consists of a 30-hour curriculum that helps offenders

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prepare for their job search and set career goals (Illinois Department of Corrections 1999).

Several states are developing a system-wide employment services program. Indiana has begun developing a program modeled on Texas's Project RIO. Carolyn Heier, education director of the Indiana Department of Corrections, is working closely with representatives from the Project RIO group to develop a similar system in Indiana. Currently, only 60 prisoners are enrolled in the program (August 15, 2001, Urban Institute interview). Indiana hopes to expand the program to all inmates who are released.

Michigan's Department of Corrections has recently begun participating in a national program called Amer-I-Can, a 60-hour program that teaches employment and life skills such as communications, goal setting, financial management, job search, and job retention. Michigan's participation began in 1998, and 500 soon-to-be released prisoners graduated in 1999 (Michigan Department of Corrections 1999).

Typically, courses in employment services are small and available just prior to release from prison. Although most states in this survey emphasize the need for teaching offenders effective work habits and job retention skills, some offer these skills within the context of other programs. For example, one stated goal of the Minnesota Correctional Industries is for inmates to develop a sound work ethic (MINNCOR Industries 2000). Similarly, the Illinois Correctional Industries has tried to create a real-world work environment for their inmate employees, one that requires not only job-related skill development, but also training in the skills and habits needed to both obtain and maintain employment (Illinois Correctional Industries 2000).

Among the experts with whom we spoke, the general view is that pre-release employment services programs can be critical for helping inmates. They stressed that the more prepared candidates have better prospects for finding and retaining employment. Mindy Tarlow, the executive director for the Center for Employment Opportunities, mentioned that several federal agencies—including the Office of Correctional Education in the U.S. Department of Education and the Federal Bureau of Prisons—have recognized the importance of employment services programming and have begun several initiatives to increase and improve this programming in state and federal prisons.

However, Charles Terry, assistant professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan-Flint, and a former prisoner as well, noted during an interview (September 28, 2001) that in his experience few prisons make prisoner reentry (i.e., the transition of released offenders into communities) a priority. He also noted that despite considerable attention given to programming and reentry, political support for sustained funding is unlikely. According to Professor Terry, evidence of this lack of support is reflected in part by the discontinuation of Pell Grants and the discontinuation of many prison-based programs.

Participation Rates in Prison Programming

We now consider the extent to which prisoners participate in the types of programs discussed. As previously noted, national data indicate that approximately 35 percent of inmates receive educational programming and that approximately 27 percent receive vocational programming (Travis et al. 2001, 17). And research suggests that the vast majority of inmates have significant educational, vocational, and employment deficits (Gaes et al. 1999; Cullen and Gendreau 2000), suggesting that few inmates are receiving programming they may need.

The prison program participation rates in all seven states are relatively low compared with national-level participation rates. For most of the types of programming in each of the seven states, fewer than 10 percent of inmates participate in the programming. As shown in table 4, significant variation in program participation exists across states. The rates for educational programs range from 6 percent (completion) in Illinois to 58 percent (participation) in Ohio. Combined, there are approximately 60,000 educational program participants in the seven states. However, the actual number of individuals enrolled in educational programs may be smaller because many offenders participate in multiple educational programs.

There are 11,500 vocational program participants in six of the states surveyed. Iowa did not report any participants in vocational programming. The participation rates for vocational programs are significantly lower than academic programs, ranging from approximately 4 to 13 percent across the states.

All states surveyed have prison industries, and about 11,300 offenders worked in a prison industry in fiscal year 2000. Participation rates in prison industries are similar to vocational programs (three to 15 percent).

Almost 30,000 offenders participated in employment services programs, with Ohio (16,500) and Illinois (11,500) accounting for the vast majority of these offenders. Indiana and Iowa reported no employment services. Participation in employment services across the seven states ranged from less than one percent to 35 percent.

Table 4. Estimated Number of Offenders in State Prison Programs, 2000

	Number of participants (and percentage of total prison population):			
	Education programs	Vocation programs	Prison industries	Employment programs
Illinois	• 3,025 program completions (6.4%)	• 2,256 program completions (4.8%)	• 1,427 employees, on average, in industries (3.0%)	• 11,512 program participants (24.4%)
Indiana	• 7,702 program participants (35.8%)	• 1,845 program participants (8.6%)	• 1,468 employed in prison industries (6.8%)	• No statewide program
Iowa	• 3,363 program participants (42.6%) • 839 program completions (10.6%)	• No statewide program	• 683 employees in prison industries (8.6%)	• No statewide program
Michigan	• 10,900 program participants (23.8%)	• 2,143 participated, on average, in programs (4.7%)	• 3,000 employees in prison industries (6.6%)	• 250 program completions (0.5%)
Minnesota	• 1,950 program participants (30.1%)	• 831 program participants (12.8%)	• 972 employees in prison industries (15.0%)	• 655 program participants (10.1%)
Ohio	• 27,313 program participants (58.4%)	• 3,550 program participants (7.6%) • 1,386 received certificates (3.0%)	• 2,978 employees in prison industries (6.4%)	• 16,578 program participants (35.4%)
Wisconsin	• 2,857 participated, on average, in programs (13.6%)	• 929 participated, on average, in programs (4.4%) • 972 program completions (4.6%)	• 754 employees in prison industries (3.6%)	• 248 program participants (1.2%)

Notes: Estimates are based on fiscal year 2000 data, except for Ohio, which is based on 1999 data. The data come from interviews and review of state materials. Key information was not readily available to provide systematic and consistent comparisons of state-level program participation or completion rates. Some states do not produce reports on program characteristics, numbers of inmates who need different types of programming, numbers of participants in particular programs, and duration of participant involvement.

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V. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING AND EXPANDING CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMMING

What are the strategic opportunities for improving existing employment-related programs and introducing new programs in prisons?

Highlights

- An opportunity exists to build new strategic partnerships and collaborations or strengthen existing ones among a diverse group of organizations that can agree on a common goal of improving the education and work skills of prisoners.
- Expanding and improving correctional programs could be reframed from a way to rehabilitate individuals to a way to increase offender accountability.
- Correctional education and training curricula could be systematically reviewed and updated.
- Businesses from the private sector could be engaged in the training and employment of offenders prior to their release, with the goal of linking these prisoners to employment after release.
- Correctional instructor skills could be improved and enhanced, both for teaching and for navigating instruction in correctional settings.
- Process and outcome evaluations could be conducted to identify not only programs that work, but also the specific characteristics of programs that most improve ex-offender employment outcomes.
- A best practices survey of correctional programs could be conducted.
- The ability of correctional agencies to track offender demand, participation, and program availability could be improved.
- The ability of correctional agencies to assess offenders' needs and match them with appropriate programming could be improved.

For the purpose of this analysis, we classify strategic opportunities for improving and expanding correctional programs into three categories: policy opportunities, practice opportunities, and research opportunities. In each instance, we identify *what* the opportunity is, we comment on *why* the opportunity is important, and we make suggestions on *how* this opportunity cam be exploited.

Urban Institute recommendations are based on interviews with stakeholders, reviews of other relevant materials, and Farabee et al.'s (1999) and Lo-Buglio's (2001) recent commentaries on how to improve corrections-based programming. These recommendations identify concrete opportunities that legislators, corrections agencies, and private foundations could take advantage of to improve and expand effective prison-based programs.

Opportunities to Change Policies

1. **An opportunity exists to build new strategic partnerships and collaborations or strengthen existing ones among a diverse group of public agencies and private organizations. Many organizations, with different perspectives, can agree on a common goal of improving the education and work skills of prisoners.**

WHY Interest in introducing and improving correctional programs has increased in recent years. Such collaborations could strive to build a more concentrated and cohesive political constituency for correctional programs.

HOW Potential strategic partners include state and federal departments of labor, departments of education, departments of correction, prisoners' rights advocacy groups, business associations, education-related associations, researchers, and victims' rights groups. These key stakeholders could come together for the purposes of consolidating efforts, improving information exchange across interested organizations, setting an agenda, and prioritizing next steps.

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2. **The objective of rehabilitating offenders to be better human beings so they can lead a more productive, socially acceptable life has seen declining support over the past two decades. Expanding and improving correctional programs could be reframed from a way to rehabilitate individuals to a way to increase offender accountability.**

WHY Requiring offenders to "be productive" and "work hard" like the average citizen may be more politically palatable and publicly supported than offering incarcerated individuals programs for rehabilitative purposes.

HOW This effort could be approached at the state level, agency level, or facility level. Laws mandating work or training while incarcerated could be passed by state legislatures. For example, Oregon recently adopted a series of changes in response to the 1994 Prison Reform and Inmate Work Act. The changes include an automated assessment process for identifying offender needs, matching of offender needs with appropriate programming, monitoring of inmate progress, and graduated vocational training and work experiences that culminate with the offender's release (LoBuglio 2001). Alternatively, departments of corrections could introduce policies that require offenders to attain certain education levels before release by a parole board, or individual wardens could implement programs at their facilities given sufficient money and resources.

Opportunities to Change Practices

3. **Correctional education and training curricula could be systematically reviewed and updated.**

WHY Due to limited resources, typical correctional programs have not been regularly reviewed and updated and are often out of date. The tremendous recent changes in technology make it more difficult for offenders to succeed if trained in outdated industries or technologies.

HOW Organizations that develop standards and curricula for other educational and vocational endeavors could be hired to update and restructure correctional curricula. The Correctional Education Association (CEA) has developed a set of standards that could provide the foundation for a systematic review.

4. **Businesses from the private sector could be engaged in the training and employment of offenders prior to their release, with the goal of linking these prisoners to employment after release.**

WHY Despite the current, short-term economic concerns, businesses (manufacturers in particular) are forecasting a shortage of workers in the not-too-distant future. Several participants at a recent conference ("Correctional Education and Training: Raising the Stakes" September 24, 2001) noted that many industries are increasingly in need of a well-trained workforce. The estimated high-level of demand over the next decade suggests opportunities for prisons to train offenders in job skills that can be parlayed into well-paying positions. There is considerable interest among both criminal justice and workforce development policymakers and practitioners for in-prison programs that can better prepare inmates for post-release employment.

HOW Business associations in partnerships with departments of corrections could organize job fairs for soon-to-be-released offenders. (The Federal Bureau of Prisons has adopted this approach with considerable success.) Businesses often are reluctant to participate, but after attending the job fairs typically become enthusiastic supporters because of the direct benefits to them.

5. **Correctional instructor skills could be improved and enhanced, both for teaching and for navigating instruction in correctional settings.**

WHY Inmates have unique educational needs and correctional facilities pose unique logistical challenges. Correctional instructors may not be properly trained to handle such distinctive challenges. Indeed, many programs use volunteer instructors with little to no teaching experience.

HOW Many community colleges and universities have faculty who may be willing to provide instructor training at little or no cost to prison systems.

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Opportunities to Improve Research

6. **Evaluations to assess the impact on post-release employment and recidivism and identify poorly run existing programs could be conducted.**

   WHY As indicated by the literature review, there is a considerable need for rigorous process and outcome evaluations of well-designed correctional programs, with a particular eye toward identifying characteristics of these programs that most affect prisoner outcomes. Solid research evidence may increase public and political support for correctional programs.

   HOW Evaluations could be conducted by research units within the departments of correction, local research partners, or nationally known research organizations.

7. **A best practices survey of correctional programs could be conducted.**

   WHY A compilation of best practices for educational and vocational programs does not exist.

   HOW The survey could be conducted by research units within the departments of correction, local research partners, or larger research organizations. One model for this approach is provided by Ohio's Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, which has established an Office of Reentry and Correctional Best Practices.

8. **The ability of correctional agencies to track offender demand, participation, and program availability could be improved.**

   WHY In general, departments of corrections currently do not have good mechanisms for recording information related to correctional programs. As described previously, offenders are typically not assigned to programs based on their individual needs. Corrections administrators do not have efficient and accurate mechanisms to record the length of programs, the intensity of programs, the time they are offered relative to an expected release date, or the availability/demand. Better documentation of these issues may make them better positioned to make the case for expanding or improving programs.

   HOW In each state, the department of corrections (or perhaps a hired consultant) could survey and interview facility administrators and catalogue demand, participation, and availability or could develop computerized data tracking systems, preferably integrating them into existing systems.

9. **The ability of correctional agencies to assess offenders' needs and match offenders' needs with appropriate programming could be improved.**

   WHY Offenders generally are not adequately assessed in terms of their needs and skills before beginning a correctional program. This may result in inefficient use of current resources by not targeting people and programs.

   HOW Evaluations could be conducted by research units within the departments of correction, local research partners, or larger research organizations. The focus could include identifying the best strategies employed nationally to match offender needs and programming, assessing the extent to which these strategies are effective, and developing instruments and procedures that improve the effectiveness of these strategies.

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VI. KEY POLICY TARGETS

Although the Strategic Opportunities section mentioned several key policy targets, this section focuses more directly and systematically on the people, agencies, and organizations that could facilitate the improvement and enhancement of prison-based programming.

Our discussions with program directors and key administrators in departments of corrections indicate that correctional programming is dependent not only on funding but also on other state agencies, federal agencies, school districts, non-governmental organizations, and private firms. These groups frequently are essential to ongoing prison programming. Many practitioners noted, however, that these same groups just as frequently remain largely untapped resources.

Based on publications and on interviews with representatives from the seven states, table 5 provides a list of key policy targets important to improving and enhancing successful programming. A brief description of each category is provided below.

Table 5. Key Policy Targets for Improving and Enhancing Prison Programming

Strategic Partners	Identified Partners	Specific Examples
State Agencies *State departments of corrections frequently target other state agencies in promoting and providing prison programming.*	• State libraries • Workforce development offices • State-run regional resource centers • State vocational departments • State budget offices	Wisconsin's Bureau of Correctional Enterprises (BCE) has created a Transitional Community Placement Project that targets inmates who are scheduled to be released and who are working in a Wisconsin prison industry. The transition program enhances the work offenders are doing in their prison industry job with ethics and job skills training. The most common collaborators are the state's agencies on education—state departments of education and state boards of regents.
Colleges and Local School Districts *Private, state, and community colleges, as well as local school districts, provide educational and vocational materials, student volunteers, and training for teachers.*	• Community colleges • Private and state universities • Local school districts	The Indiana University and Purdue University Reading Programs have partnered with the Department of Corrections in Indiana to provide tutoring for offenders in adult literacy programs.
Federal Agencies *Federal agencies provide financial support for in-prison programming.*	• Department of Education • Department of Labor • Department of Justice	Federal funds are provided for Title 1 and Special Education programs for juveniles as well as some adult education programs.
Non-Governmental Organizations *NGOs offer programs to supplement prison programming with skills-based volunteer opportunities.*	• Good Will Industries • Habitat for Humanity • United Way	Local chapters of Habitat for Humanity have worked with correctional programs in Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin to create opportunities for offenders to learn building skills and help the community.
Private Companies *State departments of correction also target private corporations for promoting and providing prison programming. Private corporations invest in correctional programming by offering business to local prison industries and training to offenders.*	• Manufacturing companies • Internet providers and software manufacturers	• Prison industries like MINNCOR (Minnesota) and BCE (Wisconsin) have established partnerships with private companies. The partnerships provide additional work opportunities for offenders, and private companies receive a reliable and flexible workforce for large projects. • The Department of Corrections in Minnesota voiced interest in working with Internet providers and software manufacturers to produce a way for offenders to develop computer skills with a simulated Internet connection.

Source: Based on publications and on Urban Institute interviews with key personnel from state departments of corrections.

State Agencies

State agencies were the most frequently cited strategic partners. They provide both financial resources and programming support. State libraries could supply materials and resources for prison educators. Workforce development offices could work with departments of corrections to make sure offenders are well-prepared for finding and retaining employment upon release. State-run regional resource centers work with correctional facilities to find local jobs in the communities offenders will be returning to when they are released. Because they are often treated as separate entities, the state's prison industries are also a commonly cited state partner. The collaboration opportunities between the prison industries and other groups, especially businesses, lie in creating programs that match existing business needs.

Colleges and Local School Districts

The next most frequently cited strategic partner was colleges and local school districts, focusing on programming that these educational institutions provided directly. For example, the Iowa Department of Corrections works closely with the community college system to provide college-level courses for inmates. Private and state universities were also mentioned as partners. Departments of Corrections in Wisconsin and Indiana have partnered with state universities and private colleges to bring student tutors and state-of-the-art teaching techniques to offenders. Local school districts also were reported as a source to provide technical support for teachers in prison.

Federal Agencies

Federal agencies were cited as strategic partners. The partnership is built around the financial assistance the federal agencies provide to state departments of corrections. The three agencies that were cited most often were the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice. The Department of Education provides funding for ABE, Title 1, and other juvenile programs. And the Department of Justice oversees the Prison Industries Enhancement Certification Program discussed earlier in this report.

Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were mentioned because of the support and opportunities they provide prisoners. Representatives from Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan explicitly mentioned collaborations with NGOs. Wisconsin and Michigan work with Habitat for Humanity, building affordable housing and allowing prisoners to learn appropriate skills on the job. Indiana's Department of Corrections works with United Way and Good Will Industries on projects that help the community and build skills for offenders.

Private Companies

Private companies comprise the final group of policy targets mentioned by prison officials and other respondents. Companies in Minnesota and Wisconsin provide jobs for offenders who still are in prison. Both prison industries and private companies form partnerships under the Department of Justice PIE program. These partnerships provide unique opportunities for inmates to be exposed to and participate in work that will enable them to develop the skills necessary to obtain higher paying employment upon release from prison.

VII. CONCLUSION

This report provides a preliminary investigation of correctional education and employment-related programs in terms of their effectiveness, the current practices, and strategic opportunities and policy targets. The Urban Institute's preliminary investigation suggests that prison-based programming (education, vocational training, prison industries, employment services) can be effective in reducing recidivism and increasing post-release employment prospects. However, there is as yet no definitive body of research firmly establishing this link, or that this link is strong. The assessment also shows that programming participation rates vary considerably across types of programs and among the seven states examined. Finally, it highlights a range of strategic opportunities and policy targets that currently exist for improving and enhancing correctional programming.

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